



Top license holder

Chris Galassie of Menasha uses his amateur radio equipment to reach other operators the world over. Recently Chris attained the "extra" radio operator's license, highest in the

field. Only about one percent of the nation's operators hold the license and Chris, at 14 years old, is probably the youngest in Wisconsin. (News-Record photo)

An 'extra' Ham at the age of 14

BY SALLY NELSON
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MENASHA — On Aug. 18 Chris Galassie, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Galassie, passed an examination in Chicago for his extra amateur radio operator license, making him probably the youngest such licensed operator in the state. Chris is 14 years old.

Chris, who is an outstanding student in school and is especially interested in electronics, saw an ad in a newspaper

two years ago stating that an amateur radio operator course was being offered by Charlie Banks of Neenah.

According to Banks, when Chris contacted him, Chris was only 11 years old and it had been Bank's rule not to accept students under 12 years of age.

Chris told Banks, "I'll pay attention ... and I'm big for my age, no will have to know."

During the course, Banks said Chris never missed a lesson, sometimes having to be excused from practice for Christmas activities at St. Mary Grade School, to attend. He was a serious student, said Banks, and credited him with the persistence to stick to a problem even after having failed at a solution the first or second time.

Chris studied with Banks until he passed his test for a novice license and then kept on working through the requirements and tests for technician, general, and advanced licenses before attempting the examination for "extra." He has been self-taught since obtaining the novice license. An advanced knowledge of mathematics has been essential to Chris, since he had to use trigonometry in studying and carrying out exercises for the advanced operator's license. He is now a part of the Amateur Radio Service, an organization that offers service to the public such as aid during disasters.

To date, Chris has contacted people in Italy, Costa Rica, Chile and even Indonesia.

Only about one percent of those who attain novice licenses go on to the extra category. Chris said there are about 3,000 amateurs in the state with 280 having extra licenses. Banks said he estimated about 300,000 amateurs in the country with about two or three thousand qualifying for the top advanced licenses.

To earn the extra license, the operator must be able to transmit 20 words per minute in code. Chris can send about 25 words per minute at the present time.

According to Chris, people must spend time regularly at their radios in order to keep up the pace of sending. If a person does not practice his skills almost continually, he quickly loses the ability to transmit at his top speed.

Chris said he does not have a lot of money tied up in his equipment. He does have both short wave and VHF equipment. Most "ham" operators cooperate, some through affiliation with the Neenah-Menasha Amateur Radio

Club, and sell or swap equipment. An amateur can determine for himself the amount he wishes to spend beyond essentials which can be as little as \$100 for a "rig" that will put him in contact with other operators the world over, directly or through relay.

Presently, Chris has the call letters, WB9UJJ, but he is exercising an option allowed extra license holders and has requested new letters. Only the extras, or experts, are allowed call letters that can include as few as four letters or numerals. The fewer the number the less cumbersome it is to call, said Chris.

Chris is the only member of his family presently involved in amateur radio, but his father has shown interest, he said, and may explore it if he has time at a later date. Chris has four sisters and two brothers at home.

Other hobbies enjoyed by Chris are woodcarving and fishing and boating. The Galassie home is on the shore of the river. He is also a piano student of Franklin Doverspike at the University of Wisconsin Campus-Fox Valley. It was Banks who suggested Chris pursue lessons after hearing him play at his home, another skill he learned on his own. Banks said Doverspike has mentioned Chris is doing exceptionally well and that he "is having a time keeping up with him."

Chris said that he hopes he will be able to use his knowledge of amateur radio in his future career, which will be "something in the electronics field," he said. He said he is sure he will continue it as a hobby and use the technical aspects in other ways.

He has learned a lot about building, he said, and has used the information to make an amplifier for a chiming clock, for a side-tone oscillator to be able to hear tones as he transmits messages and on a special project that is still a secret.

Chris believes that amateur radio can be a fascinating hobby for many people but admits that operators must be patient in learning. It also helps to be a "night person," since after sundown is one of the best times for making contacts in some directions.